

NEWS FROM TURIN

On the 7th of September 1992, a Monday, the Shroud was privately displayed in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Turin before five experts in the conservation of ancient textiles. The Cardinal Archbishop of Turin, Mons. Giovanni Saldarini, was present along with representatives of the Superintendence of Arts and Architecture, from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, and the Council for Piedmontese Cultural Heritage, the administration responsible for the conservation of historical and artistic patrimony in Piedmont. The Shroud falls into this public administration even though it is the property of the Holy See. Nicola Pisano was in attendance for photographic documentation.

The textile experts were: Sheila Landi (England), Mechtheld Flury-Lemberg (Switzerland), Jeanette M. Cardamone (Philadelphia), Silvio Diana and Gian Luigi Nicola (Italy). We note that three of the five are authorities in the restoration of antique paintings.

A comprehensive study of the Shroud linen is envisaged, starting with decisions concerning the very best method of preserving the cloth from the point of view of temperature, humidity, chemical composition of the surrounding air. The previous private exposition was held in 1969 for a commission of experts to examine the condition of the Shroud for conservation purposes. Their report, published in 1973, was followed by the publication of critical responses.

The recent inspection was made by observation only. The cloth was never touched, no fragments were removed, no instruments applied. From this brief viewing, the experts are to set up a program of work that will advise how to avoid deterioration of the image and the cloth. The group discussed non-destructive, no-sample-taking methods of characterizing the yarn and weave; the possibility that the relative chromatic intensities of the cloth background versus image might change, and that discoloration due to aging could occur. They will compile a report that will be the basis for a complete study on the Shroud linen, including conditions for storage, exhibition and further analyses. A summary will be prepared and sent to the Holy See and the custodian, Archbishop of Turin. The project is expected to reach into the next few years.

The Shroud is still rolled around a cylinder and wrapped in silk. Since 1973, when new wrinkles were detected, the Image side has been rolled outward. The system of rolling the Shroud has been considered the least damaging, although it has been urged for years that the only really safe method would be to lay the cloth out flat. This would entail the construction of an entirely new and very costly reliquary, and an appropriate space in which to mount it.

In the Holy Shroud Chapel, such space is not conveniently available. When on May 4, 1990, shortly after Mons. Saldarini celebrated the Mass of the Feast Day of the Holy Shroud, large chunks of marble and plaster fell from an arch of the dome, the stupendous architectural masterpiece of Guarino Guarini, it was decided that the Shroud should be removed from the ornate altar to a safe location in the cathedral until the dome could be repaired. The chapel is built above the choir of the cathedral and is visible from the nave. It is however not a part of the church but of the royal palace, now the property of the Italian government. From the chapel to the church is not simply a matter of a flight of stairs, but of legal complications between Church and State.

Consequently, matters have not progressed rapidly. The Shroud remains in its XVIIth century altar, now protected by scaffolding. No repair work has begun in the chapel; the enormous wrought iron gates that formerly stood open for worshippers remain shut these past two years.

To house the Shroud when it is eventually transferred to the cathedral pending the months of restoration of the chapel, a very modern affair, designed by the architect Andrea Bruno, has been constructed using three tons of bomb-proof, bullet-proof glass, impregnable to man, offered by an Italian glass industry. Two huge sheets of glass stand separately, connected only by a glass box between them. In this glass box, the existing silver reliquary will be visible. The Shroud, rolled up, will be placed in a cylinder of titanium inside the reliquary. Cost of the project, astronomical, was guaranteed by Italian banks. The new shrine will be located behind the main altar of the cathedral. The date for the transfer has not been set.

It is of some consolation to learn that conservation studies have been initiated. The textile experts will cooperate to come up with a system of preserving the linen. A praiseworthy project, of paramount importance.

Many sindonologists, however, are uneasy. Is the conservation effort taking into full account the crucial point of concern? Is the linen to be considered apart from the unidentified coloration lying upon the tip-top fibres of the weft threads? Thomas D'Muhala has defined the Shroud by the scientific term of "singularity". It must be approached as such. Until the composition of the Image is understood, new preservation methods could imperil the very thing we intend to save.

Please read again pages 4 & 5 in *Spectrum* #40, December 1991: better still, read the entire article, "Conservation and Preservation of the Shroud of Turin" by Dr. Alan Adler, expert hors pair on the myriad intricacies of the present problem.